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English Title-Labels to the End of the Seventeenth Century

THE following notes are based mainly upon such examples of English title-labels as may be seen on the shelves of the Harvard Library. It is probable that there are earlier examples of the different types noted, as well as examples of other species and abnormal variations which might alter the tale here set forth. If any reader should chance upon them, this compiler would be most grateful to learn of their existence, for he is aware that this somewhat sketchy outline can at best only serve to stimulate interest in a subject which has not hitherto been investigated.

In Chaucer's time, and for a long while after, when a book-lover had

. . . at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes, clad in blak and reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie . . .

it was not necessary that they should be distinguished one from another by title-labels, for he knew them well by binding, size, and color. In the sixteenth century, many book owners began to be concerned that their books should bear some mark of their ownership. They therefore marked their books with heraldic super-libris, or placed on the titles their signatures and mottoes, or stamped with hand-stamps in the same place their monograms or names.¹ Later they had printed or engraved bookplates, which after the middle of the seventeenth century came into very general use. But until about that same period the owners of books were not much concerned with differentiating one volume from another. It is true that one not infrequently finds sixteenth-century books with the author's name and a brief title written on the fore-edge, but it is sometimes difficult to determine whether these inscriptions are contemporary or whether they were added in the seventeenth century. Sometimes the inscriptions were written lengthwise along the fore-edge, in the fashion shown in Plate Ib, and sometimes across the fore-

¹ Miss Emma M. Denlinger has made a considerable collection of English sixteenth- and seventeenth-century book mottoes, which it is to be hoped she will soon publish. The compiler has noted a number of English sixteenth-century name and monogram stamps and would be grateful to learn of others.

edge, so as to be more readily legible when the book stood upon the shelf with the fore-edge out, which, from the evidence of contemporary engravings, we know was the customary method of shelving books.

Occasionally one finds traces of paste on the inside of the fore-edge of the back covers of early English books, indicating that at one time they had hand-written labels similar to those shown in Plates Ia and Ib. That any of these labels have survived is probably rather the result of their having been folded into the books than because of any especial tenderness with which they have been treated. These two examples, from their calligraphy, probably date from about the mid-seventeenth century. That shown in Plate Ia is of vellum and is one of a pair on a dos-à-dos binding of the 1604 editions of Christopher Sutton's *Disce mori. Learne to die* and *Disce vivere. Learne to live*. The other example (Plate Ib) is of paper and occurs on a copy of Philippe de Mor-nay's *A worke concerning the trunesse of Christian religion*, 1617.

Some manuscripts and early printed books, mostly of continental origin, were bound with manuscript title-labels secured under sheets of horn riveted to the front covers, usually with a border of strips of brass. Such bindings, frequently called 'window bindings,' are very uncommon, at least on English books, but ten copies of the statutes of Thame School, the *Schola Thamensis*, printed by Bynneman in 1575, can be traced, all of which are elaborately bound in stamped Oxford bindings by the unidentified 'G K,' with brass clasps and bosses, and with an impression of part of the title, with leads removed, under a sheet of horn surrounded by an engraved brass border riveted to the upper, or in some cases lower, cover.² These bindings were, of course, specially commissioned by the Warden and Fellows of New College, and except for similar foundation statutes it is unlikely that such bindings would have been made.

There is, however, a much more common title-label, which, in various forms, can be found in English printed books from 1653 to 1691, although the period of its most general use appears to have ended about 1675. After several years of watching for them, the writer has seen or found record of over one hundred examples,³ and has assembled at this

² See reproduction of one of these bindings in J. Howard Brown, *A Short History of Thame School* (London, 1927), p. 44.

³ Falconer Madan, *Oxford Books* (1895-1931), III, 493-494, lists 46 examples printed at Oxford from 1656 to 1679.

moment from the Harvard shelves forty-one with the title-labels still *in situ*. For the purpose of this paper discussion will be confined mainly to these examples, because for one reason or another the published descriptions are unsatisfactory. These labels occur printed vertically on either the recto or verso of a leaf, otherwise blank, which is an integral part of some sheet or portion of a sheet which is a regular part of the book. Most of those observed are found in books of quarto or smaller sizes, but a few are found in folios, such as Edward Leigh's *A treatise of religion & learning*, 1656. Some are printed vertically in the middle of the page, others to the right or left of the center, and their position seems to have no relation to whether they are printed on rectos or versos, or at the beginning or end of the book, for all possible combinations are to be found among the Harvard examples, of which nearly three-fourths are off-center.

The primary purpose of these title-labels, according to the evidence submitted below, would appear to be for cutting out and pasting to the spines of the volumes. It is therefore not at all remarkable that in many copies of books which originally contained such title-labels they are now missing. But it is remarkable that, although the writer has examined some thousands of volumes of this period, and has enquired of others whose experience and opportunities for seeing such books are much greater than his, he has never seen a book with such a printed title-label actually affixed to the spine, nor heard of anyone who has. No doubt the day this is in print one or more examples will turn up!

The majority of the sheep- and calf-bound books of this period were made with plain backs without bands — at most with simple double blind fillets, regularly spaced — and consequently one would suppose paper title-labels could have been pasted on with some hope of surviving. However, the fact is that there are no traceable examples, certainly none on copies of books which are known to have had such title-labels printed on leaves which are an integral part of one of their sheets. The Gosse copy of John Donne's *Biathanatos*, [1646], which is described¹ as having a printed label on the spine, is not only of the wrong period and without a label printed as part of the book, but Mr F. S. Ferguson, who examined it when it passed through the auction rooms, states that the

¹ Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 72, states that this copy is now at Harvard, but although Harvard possesses four copies of that book, including two very interesting presentation ones, the Gosse copy is not one of them.

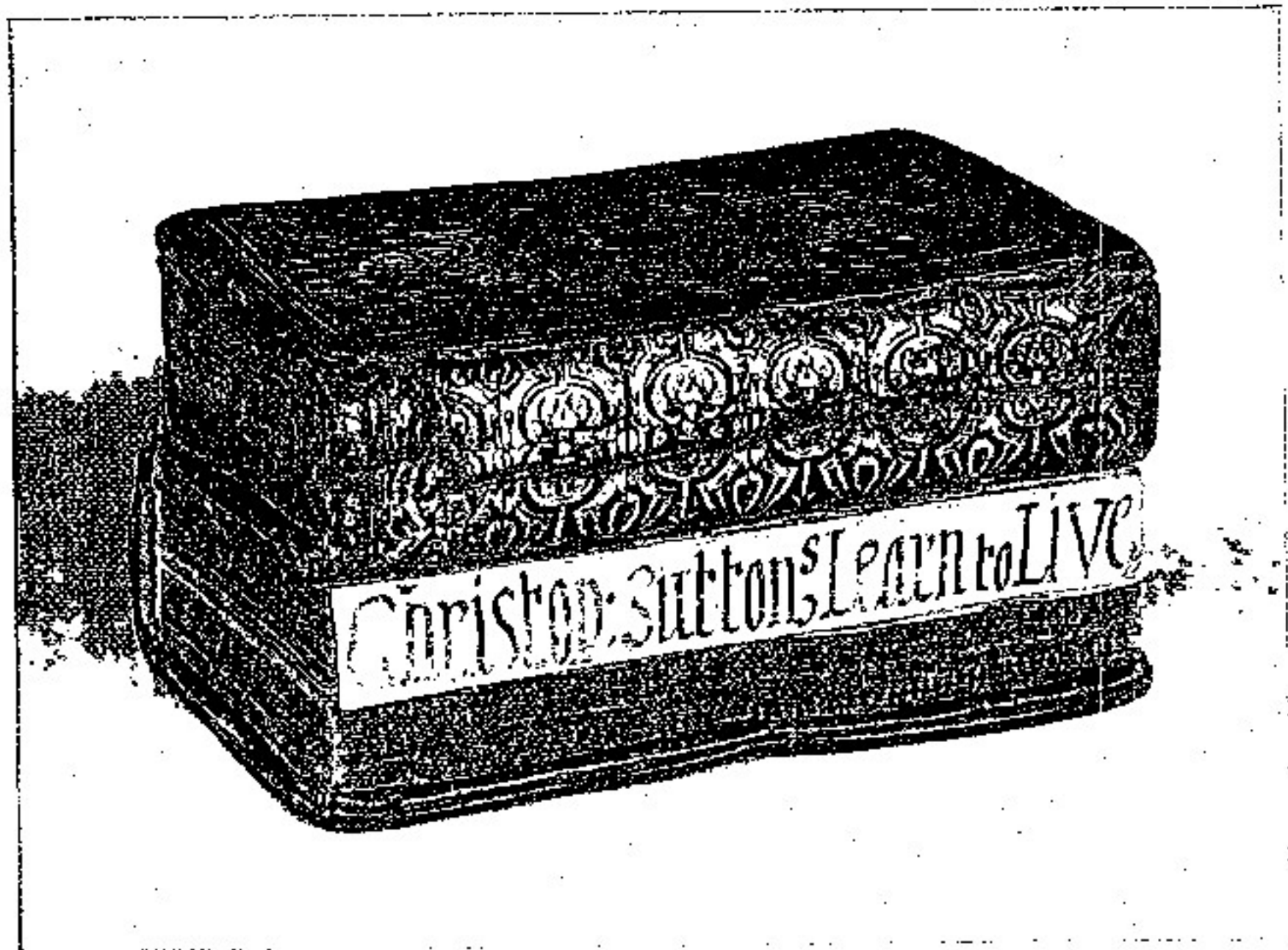


PLATE Ia

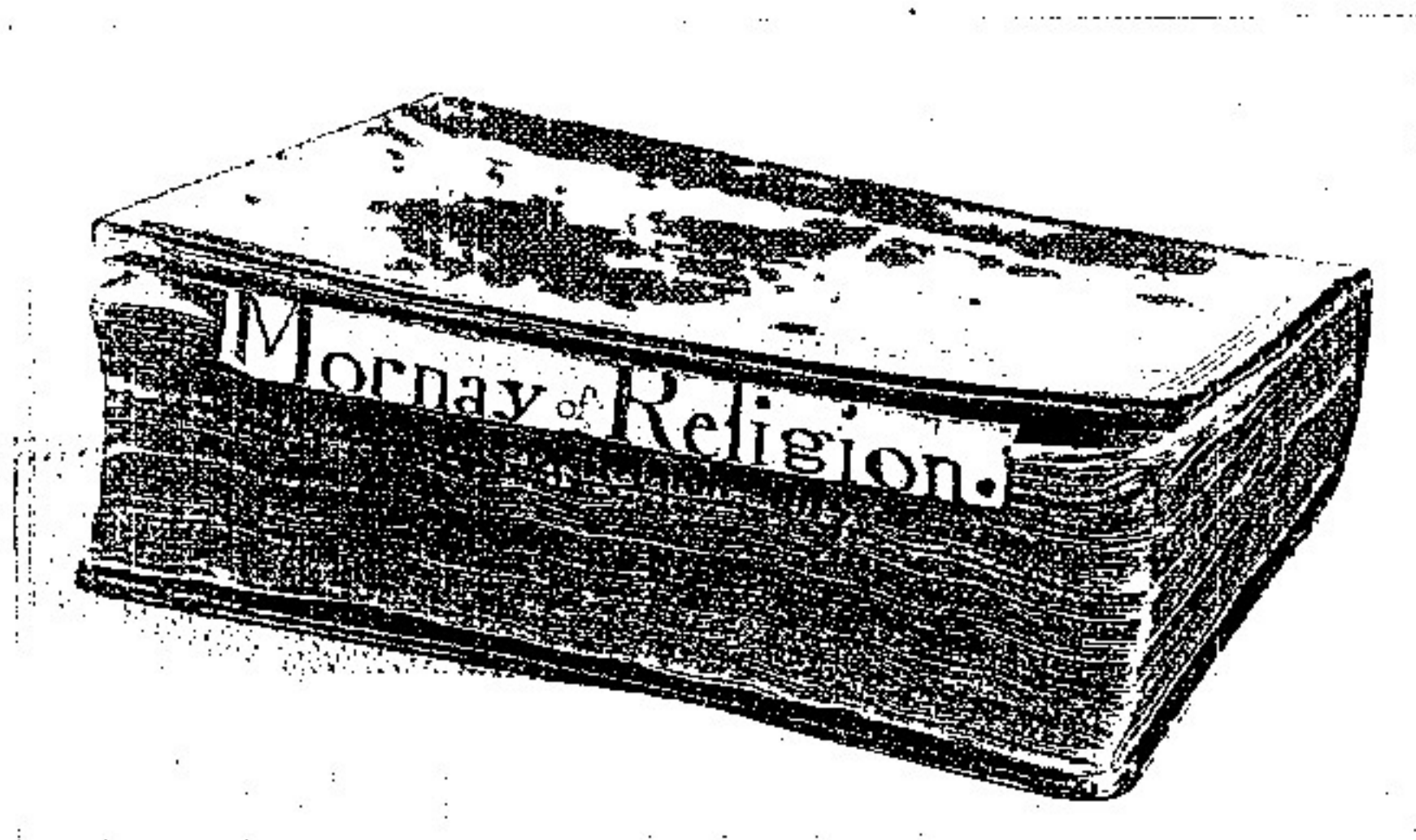


PLATE Ib

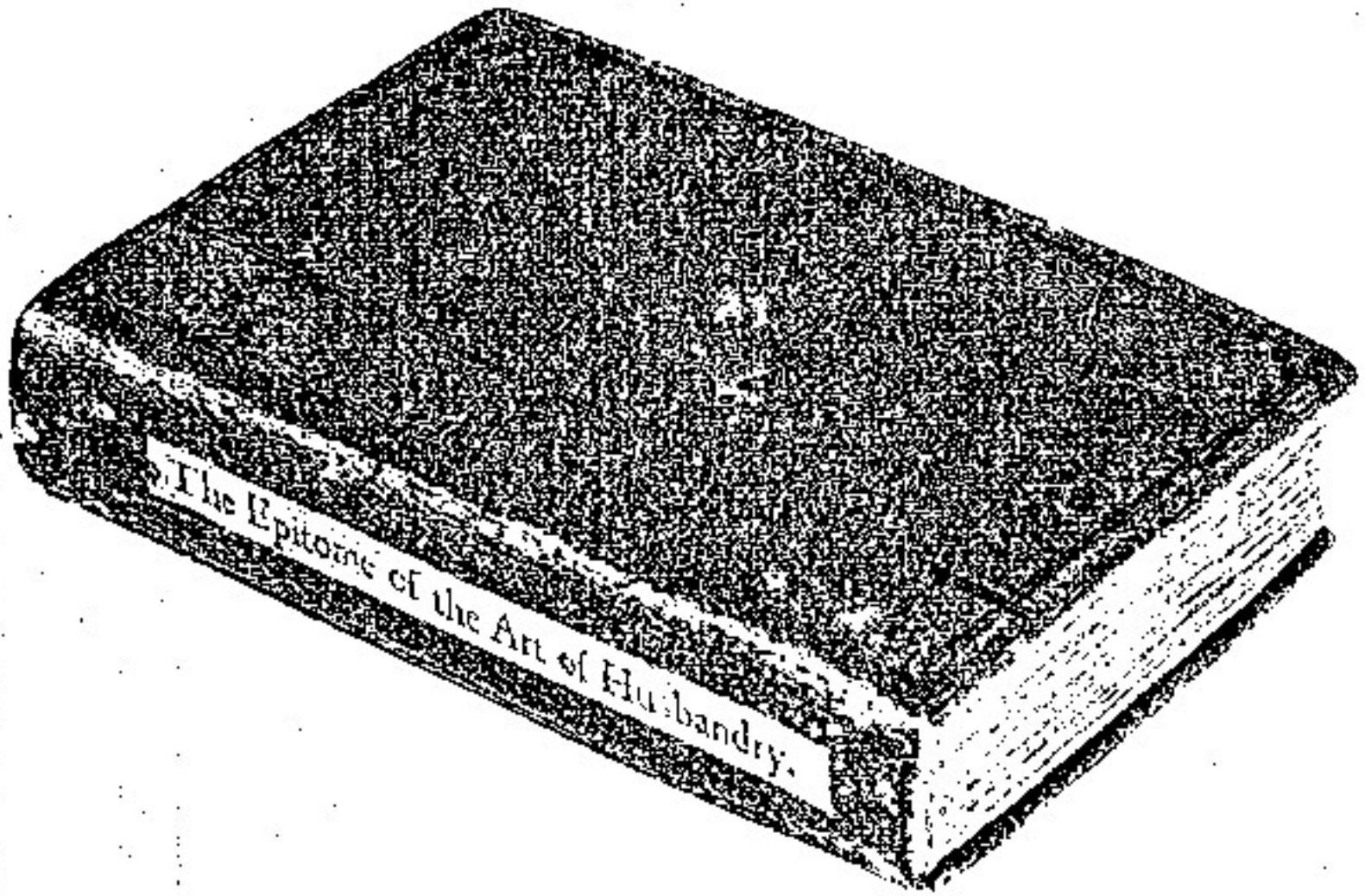


PLATE IIa

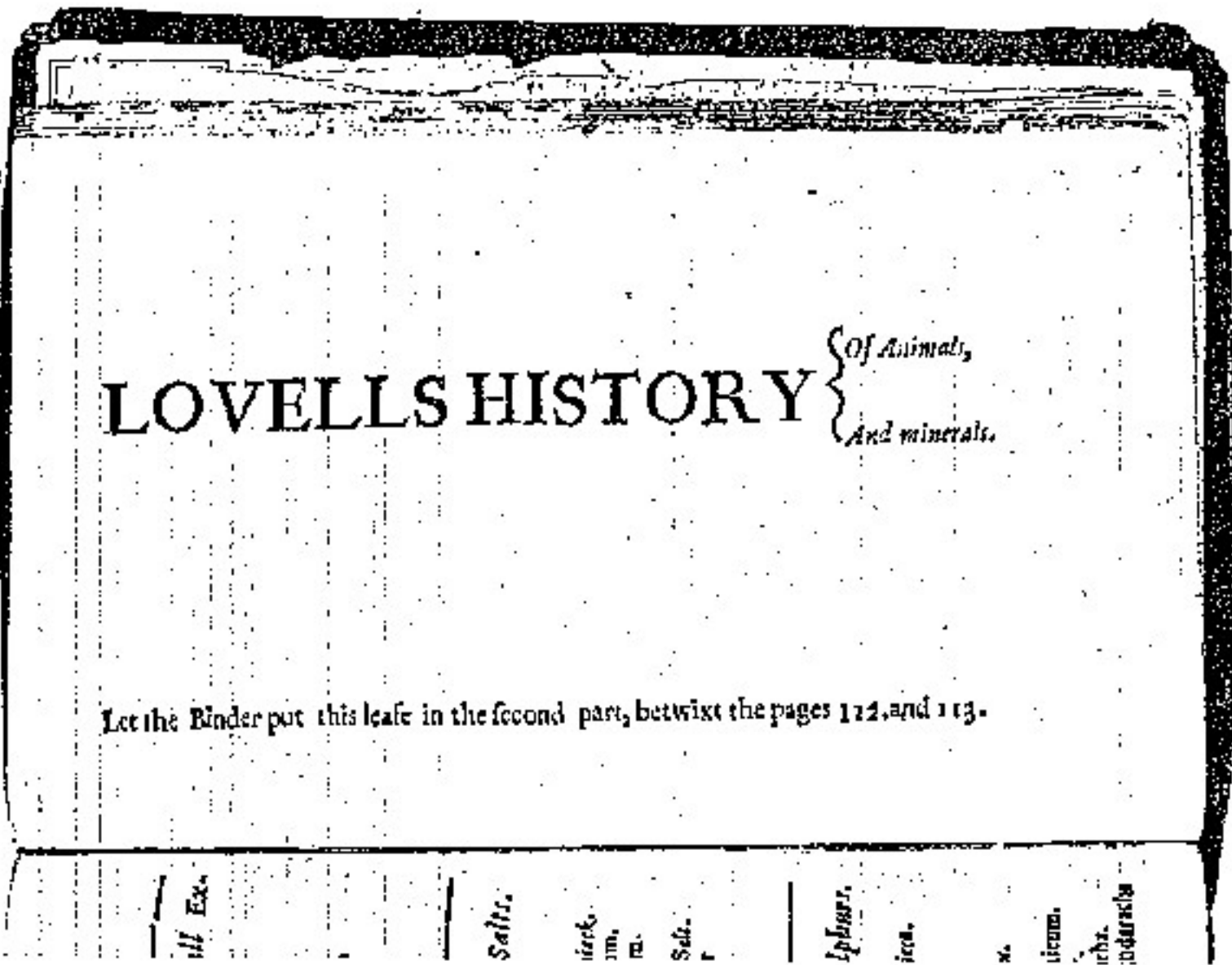


PLATE IIb

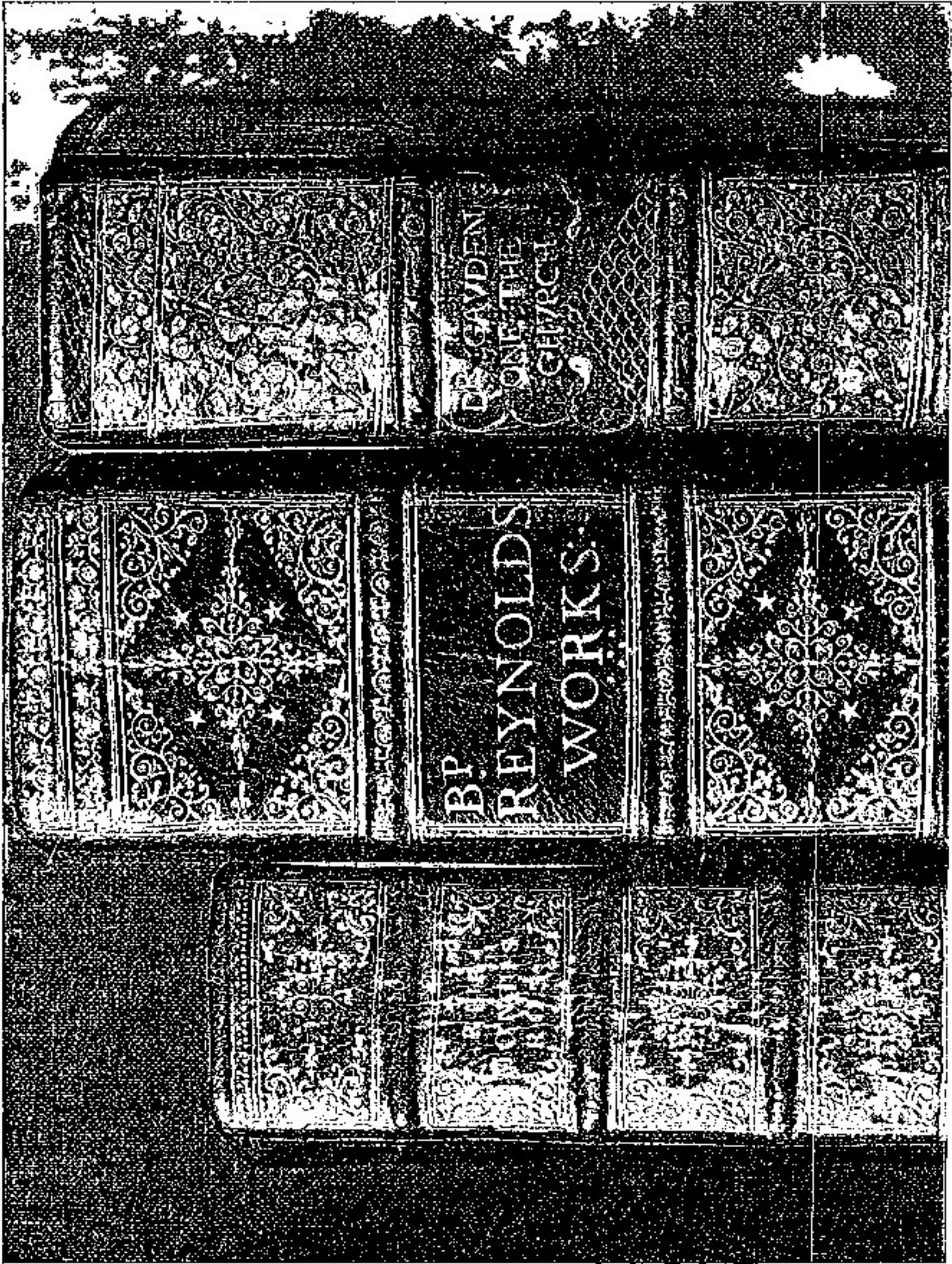


PLATE III

printing of the label is of a much later date than the book. The only other candidate known to the writer is the Thordarson copy of Joseph Blagrave's *The epitome of the art of husbandry*, 1669, now in the Library of the University of Wisconsin (see Plate IIa), which has a title-label, apparently printed coevally, affixed to the spine of its original sheep binding. However, that label must have been printed for an early owner and not for the publisher, because an examination of not only the Thordarson copy but the two copies in the Harvard Library, one of which is in original plain calf, shows that all the sheets and half-sheets are complete and that the title-label would have had to be printed as a single leaf.

In the earliest example in the Harvard Library, and perhaps the best known, Nicholas Hookes's *Amanda*, 1653, the title-label occurs on the recto [A1] of the preliminaries. In Sir Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia*, 1658, perhaps the next most familiar instance, it occurs on recto [O8], the last leaf of the book. In other cases, some of which will be discussed below, it occurs in the middle of the volume. Mr Michael Sadleir suggested, in a letter dated 25 November 1930, that these perpendicular or vertical half-titles,⁵ as they have been called, 'were intended to be folded over the sheets of the book as they lay longitudinally on the bookseller's shelf.' Unfortunately, that suggestion, attractive though it is, particularly in the neat picture that it creates of a seventeenth-century bookshop, does not stand examination. If, for example, one folded the *Amanda* leaf back over the sheets, the title-label would face in, not out (although in the case of the *Hydriotaphia* it would be quite practicable). In fact, in sixteen of the forty-one Harvard examples these leaves could not have been so used, either because they would not, when wrapped around, be facing out, or because, as in the case of Thomas Thorowgood's *Jews in America*, 1660, where the title-label occurs on the verso of the last leaf of the fifth of eighteen sheets, they would wrap only part of the book. A similar situation occurs in the sixth edition of Richard Capel's *Tentations*, 1659, where the label occurs on verso [Cc7], which is followed by a blank [Cc8] and a half-sheet of 'The Contents,' as well as by over three hundred pages of 'The Fourth Part' and 'The Remains,' which, though biblio-

⁵ The evolution of the half-title proper in English printing is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it may be remarked that, although very uncommon, normal half-titles do occur in the early seventeenth century, e.g., James I's *Opera*, 1619, which has a half-title reading horizontally 'OPERA/REGIA.'

graphically distinct, are linked to the first three parts by the general title.

That these title-labels were intended to be cut out appears to be proved by a binder's note which is printed on the same page as the label in Robert Lovell's *Πανζωορυστολογία*, Oxford, 1661 (see Plate IIb). This leaf is conjugate with an unsigned leaf which contains part of the index. That leaf is called for by the catchword on p. 112 (verso [Aaa4]) and contains on its verso a catchword which connects with p. 113 (recto [Aaa5]). Evidently, as Madan points out,⁹ the printer realized that the indices would overrun the three sheets they occupy by two pages and printed that leaf, the title-label, the title-leaf to the second part, and the blank conjugate with it, as a single unsigned half-sheet. In order that the binder would know where to place the odd, unpagged and unsigned leaf of the index, the printer printed the note to the binder, 'Let the Binder put this leafe in the second part, betwixt the pages 112, and 113.', on the conjugate leaf containing the title-label, where he expected it would be cut out, as it probably was in most cases.

Doubtless there were a good many more books with similar title-labels printed than the hundred odd which have been observed, but the fashion did not become general. Neither Moseley or Herringman, among the more important of the publishers, apparently employed it, and there is some reason to think that relatively few printers and publishers took it up. For instance, over half of the Harvard examples were printed or published by only five different individuals. Henry Brome, for one, published six of them, while Ralph Smith and Henry Hall printed five each and, according to Madan, Hall was the printer of several others. The practice spread at least as far as Edinburgh, however, for the Harvard copy of Robert Park's *The rights and liberties of the church asserted*, Edinburgh, 1689, has such a label on the recto of the last leaf [L8]. The latest example noted is Gerard Langbaine's *An account of the English dramattick poets*, Oxford, 1691, which likewise has a label on the verso of the last leaf [Oo8] in both the Harvard copies.

In that day, as is still the case, there was apparently no uniformity in opinion as to whether a title should read up or down. Of the forty-one Harvard examples, twenty-five read up and the rest down, at least as printed. There was likewise no uniformity of typography. Some used

⁹ *Op. laud.*, III, 151. Madan evidently never saw a copy with the title-label intact, for he conjectures a blank conjugate in its place.

a single-line title, in either large capitals or relatively small ones; others printed the author's name and perhaps the most important word of the title in large caps and the rest in small caps. Still others used both upper and lower case, in both roman and italic, and with a bracket of two or more lines.

Frequently the title-label gives a much more succinct idea of what the book is about than does the actual title, as, for instance, Richard Baxter's *The safe religion. Or three disputations for the reformed catholike religion against popery*, 1657, of which the title-label reads 'Baxter against Popery.', or his *The divine appointment of the Lords Day*, 1671, of which the title-label reads, 'Baxter on the Sabbath.', and Edward Parry's *David restored*, Oxford, 1660, which takes up eight lines before it declares that it is a 'discourse upon the seventy third Psalm,' while the title-label reads 'B^p PARRY *On the Lxxiii. Psalm.*' However, sometimes the title-label is somewhat misleading, as in the case of Brown's *Hydriotaphia*, 1658, where the label reads 'D^r Brown's Garden of Cyrus', which is merely the second part of the book.⁷ In other cases the title-label gives information not on the title, as for instance Thomas Hooker's *A comment upon Christ's last prayer in the Seventeenth of John*, 1656, which the title-label describes as 'Being his Seventeenth Book, made in New-England.', a fact not stated in the title but mentioned in the heading of the 'Contents.' In the case of George Starkey's *Via ad vitam. Being a short and sure way to a long life. Or Helmont justified*, 1661, the title-label reads 'Natures Explication, & Helmont's Vindication.', which is the headline throughout.

Among the Harvard examples are two, William Ramsey's *The gentlemen's companion*, 1672, and Sir Charles Wolseley's *The case of divorce*, 1673, which have double title-labels, one reading up and the other down, printed on successive leaves.⁸ Presumably, on the principle that there is nothing new under the sun, the extra labels were supplied,

⁷ When this volume was reprinted for Henry Brome in quarto in the same year, 1658, to be appended to the fourth edition of *Pseudodoxia epidemica*, published by Edward Dod, the title-label was printed on the recto of the first preliminary leaf, Sig [5 ¶], and corrected to read 'D^r Brown's Enquiries & Garden of Cyrus.' This section of the book contains a separate alphabet of signatures numbered '5', while the last quire of the *Pseudodoxia epidemica* is signed Qqq and contains part of a table. Apparently this reprint of the *Hydriotaphia* was, by arrangement between Dod and Brome, made after the *Pseudodoxia epidemica* was already printed, for the general title which links the two appears, in the Harvard copy, to be a cancel. The title-label, of course, refers only to Brome's own production.

⁸ It is perhaps worthy of note that Sir Charles's name does not occur on the title

as is often now done with fine press books, for replacement in case one became damaged.

A curious title-label occurs in the third edition of Alexander Ross's *Πανσέβεια*, 1658, a book which has numerous engraved portraits, for in it the label is not printed but engraved.⁹ Still another unusual example occurs on a leaf conjugate with the general title of Richard Baxter's *Apology against the modest exceptions of Mr T. Blake*, 1654, which is a volume made up of four bibliographically distinct works linked by a general title. In it, the title-label, 'Baxter's Apology,' is printed horizontally on the recto a little higher than would be normal in a modern half-title. More than an inch below it is printed a single rule — in the Harvard copy this is barely inked. Below the rule, again about an inch below, is printed '*Directions for the Binder. / The General Title. / The Answer [bracketed to left of] / 1. To Blake. / 2. To Kendall. / . . .*', which informs him in what order the parts should be bound. Presumably these directions were intended to be cut out, and in another Harvard copy they have been, which would leave half a mutilated leaf containing the title-label. The following year Thomas Underhill, who was the principal publisher of this conglomerate book, published Thomas Hotchkis's *An exercitation concerning the nature of forgiveness of sin*, 1655, which has a normal title-label printed vertically on the first leaf of the preliminaries, and it seems not unlikely that the horizontal printing of it in the Baxter volume was an early experiment in this, then relatively new, device.

What is apparently another experimental form occurs in Thomas Fuller's *A comment on Ruth*, 1654, published by George and Henry Eversden, which contains a vertical title-label on the verso of the first leaf of the preliminaries. On the recto of the same leaf is the signature '¶' between two rows of acorn ornament, so heavily inked, in the the Harvard copy at least, that it shows through the paper and would have been a blemish had the label been cut out and pasted on the back. One would be fairly certain that this was merely an early and not very intelligent use of this device were it not that in the 1669 edition of Thomas Fuller's *Good thoughts in bad times*, printed by J. R. for John Williams, there are title-labels for both parts, reading 'Fullers

or in the body of this book, which, except for the title-labels, 'St. Charles Wolseley on Divorce,' is anonymous.

⁹ See reproduction in Michael Sadleir, *The Evolution of Publishers' Binding Styles 1770-1900* (London, 1930), p. 24.

Meditations,' on the versos of the first leaves of each part, with signatures on the rectos. Though bibliographically distinct except for the linking by the general title, the two parts had been published together eight times previous to this edition of 1669, and in all the editions up to at least the sixth, of 1657, had borne a device of a crown, which was John Williams's sign, on the verso of the first leaves of each part, the rectos being blank except for signatures. In 1665 Williams had moved to the 'Crown and Globe,' and in the eighth edition, published that year, title-labels similar to those of the 1669 edition were, according to Strickland Gibson,¹⁰ substituted for the crown device. In 1667, John Williams had moved again, to the Blue Anchor in Little Britain, and the crown device was even less appropriate. It is probable that the use of title-labels in these editions was due to a careless and rather stupid compositor, who realized that the crown device was not appropriate but who thoughtlessly repeated the signatures of the earlier editions.

Although paper labels pasted on leather bindings would be peculiarly liable to destruction by handling, dampness, and many other hazards, there would appear to be quite another reason why this particular type of label is not found at least occasionally.¹¹ These labels were devised at the very time when English binders were beginning to adopt the relatively new French custom of lettering in gold directly on the leather. In a very few years the new mode became so general that Pepys, dissatisfied with the dull appearance of his library, sent all his books to his binder to have their backs lettered and gilded. In Plate III are shown three books from the Harvard shelves which illustrate the new style, at least in morocco bindings. The first, on the left, is a French binding on a Paris-printed English book of 1648; the other two are English books of 1658 and 1659.¹² He would be a bold man who would state that these books were bound immediately after printing, but the bindings appear to belong to a time very near to those dates, at any rate, and it is easy to see why the notion of paper labels did not become generally established.

WILLIAM A. JACKSON

¹⁰ Strickland Gibson, 'A Bibliography of the Works of Thomas Fuller, D.D.,' *Oxford Bibliographical Society, Proceedings & Papers*, IV (1936), 120.

¹¹ The manuscript paper labels which are so neatly pasted between the bands on the backs of many Fugger books seem to have suffered very little through the centuries.

¹² Reading from left to right the volumes are: Bishop George Wishart's *L. G. De rebus . . . sub imperio . . . Jacobi Montisrosarini*, Paris, 1648; Bishop Edward Reynolds's *The works*, 1658; and Dr John Gauden's *Ἱερὰ δάκρυα*, 1659.

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